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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000465

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DAKAR PLS PASS RAO,ODC, AND DAO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: MEDIA CRACKDOWN CONTINUES

REF: A. BANJUL 396 ET AL

[1](#)B. BANJUL 422

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The GOTG's crackdown on the media continues, as the journal, "Independent" remains closed and there are reports of authorities preventing publication of another journal, "Daily Express." The international NGO community has wasted no time in reacting to the crackdown, as exemplified by the July 14 statement of the Committee to Protect Journalists expressing concern over the plight of individual journalists. U.S. concern over the media crackdown remains a key topic in our dialog with the GOTG. END SUMMARY.

ONGOING CRACKDOWN

[1](#)2. (C) The Gambia's privately owned media institutions continue to be targetted by authorities in the negative human rights trend here in recent months. As previously reported (ref a), in late March, following a failed coup plot, the GOTG closed the offices of a journal, "Independent," known for its harsh criticisms of President Yahya Jammeh and his government, and it has yet to resume publication. Subsequently, the foreign-based online publication, "Freedom Newspaper," also anti-Jammeh in outlook, claimed that pro-GOTG hackers had been responsible for the disruption of its website and public disclosure of subscribers' names; authorities reacted by calling in locally resident subscribers for questioning.

[1](#)3. (C) Besides closing the "Independent," authorities detained the paper's General Manager, Madi Ceesay, and Chief Editor, Musa Saidykhan, for several weeks before releasing them without charge. A journalist with the paper, Lamin Fatty, was also picked up and held for over two months before being released on bail. He now faces trial on charges of "printing false information."

THE SAGA OF "DAILY EXPRESS"

[1](#)4. (C) Most recently, there are reports of authorities preventing publication of another local journal, "Daily Express," following its initial appearance on newsstands July [1](#)1. Madi Ceesay, in his capacity as head of the Gambia Press Union (GPU), in a public statement, claimed that the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) had detained the journal's owner (and RFI correspondent), Sam Obi and associate Abdou Gafar, both Nigerians, and, after several days in custody, released them earlier this week. However, the NIA reportedly has informed the pair that they will face further questioning.

According to Ceesay and other sources, the "Daily Express" earned the GOTG's displeasure for, inter alia, an article in its initial edition that -- coinciding with the African Union Summit here -- reported the GOTG's refusal to permit a pre-Summit gathering of NGO's to discuss freedom of expression in The Gambia.

REACTIONS BY FOREIGN NGO'S

15. (C) The international NGO community has wasted no time in registering concern over the deteriorating media environment here and the plight of individual journalists. In its July 14 statement, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) cited the case of Ebrima Manneh, a journalist with the government mouthpiece, "Daily Observer," reporting that he had been missing since July 7. The CPJ asserted that another journalist, Sulayman Makalo, formerly with the "Independent" and "Daily Express," had gone into hiding to avoid arrest. It also noted that a former journalist, Malick Mboob, picked up May 26 by the NIA, remained in detention without charge. (COMMENT: Our contacts indicate that Manneh and Makalo may well have fled to Senegal and that Mboob was detained when authorities determined that he was among local sources of information for "Freedom Newspaper." END COMMENT)

THE CASE OF DEYDA HYDARA

16. (C) Meanwhile, the December 2004 murder of prominent journalist Deyda Hydara, associated with the independent journal, "The Point," remains unsolved, amidst persistent allegations of GOTG involvement.

COMMENT

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17. (C) U.S. concern over the media crackdown remains a prominent topic in our dialog with the GOTG, and visiting AF DAS Thomas-Greenfield reiterated that concern in her July 2 meeting with President Jammeh (ref b). Jammeh, for his part, does not conceal his distaste for the private journals and their anti-GOTG criticisms, and it is uncertain whether he will ever permit the "Independent" to resume publication. With the "Independent" closed, the two principal independent journals still operating and producing any semblance of objective reporting (including measured anti-GOTG criticism) are the daily "The Point" and "Foroyaa," which appears several times a week. Under pressure from authorities, "The Point," in particular, has noticeably eased its criticism of Jammeh and his government in recent months. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD